

A young girl with long brown hair, wearing a red baseball cap, a pink and green life vest, and a pink jacket, is focused on reeling in a fishing line. She is holding a fishing rod with a black handle and a red reel. The background is a grassy area with other people, some wearing hats, and trees in the distance, suggesting a fishing tournament or a family day out on a river.

The castle

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District

June/July 2011

**America's
Great Outdoors:**
The Upper Savannah
River has it all!

News magazine of the
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
Savannah District

Commander
Col. Jeffrey M. Hall

Corporate Communications Officer
Joyce McDonald

Chief, Public Affairs
Billy Birdwell

Editor
Rashida Banks

Writers and Contributors
Sandra Hudson
Tracy Robillard
David Wheeler

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Cover Photo

With her lifejacket safely buckled, a young girl casts her line in hopes of landing a catfish at Russell Lake's 23rd Annual Kid's Fishing Day event, May 7. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*



Runners take your mark! Best Dam Run gives Hartwell community a workout

Nearly 300 runners from the Hartwell, Ga., and Anderson, S.C., communities lined up at the Hartwell Dam for the 33rd Annual Best Dam Run on May 7. Held in partnership with the Corps of Engineers, the Hart County Running Club and the Hart County Chamber of Commerce, the event gave adults and children an opportunity to run 5-kilometer, 10-kilometer, or 1-mile routes along Hartwell Lake's scenic landscape.

"The Best Dam Run is always a successful event at Hartwell Lake," said Zach Harkness, natural resources program manager, Hartwell Dam and Lake. "The Corps of Engineers coordinates land-use, parking, traffic control and prepping parks for the crowd, but at the same time we get to work with other community groups to encourage outdoor recreation and exercise." *Photo by Bill Powell.*

By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office

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Viewpoint

From where I sit

Meet Peggy O'Bryan, New Chief of Operations, Savannah District

I've only been "sitting" in my position for a month but already know what a great honor it is to serve the Operations Division of the Savannah district. It's particularly fitting that I was invited by *The Castle* staff to write for this issue dedicated to "America's Great Outdoors." It's a subject I'm passionate about and where I began my service with the Corps.

Throughout my career, I have always had "the best job in the Corps of Engineers" and my new position in Savannah as Chief of Operations Division is the BEST of the BEST! Over the past 30 years, I have heard about the three lakes in Savannah district and the tremendous recreation opportunities they provide. These lakes are truly the benchmark for GREAT, and the challenges and issues created by supporting more than 17 million visitors have shaped Corps policy for the nation. When I finally laid eyes on these magnificent projects, I was amazed by the expansive views, the enormous power production capabilities and the incredible recreation facilities—packed with people. Our lakes are about making "lasting memories," fun-filled activities shared with friends and families. I raised my own daughter, Katie, boating and camping at Corps lakes. I am proud that she has chosen to serve our nation and is now a Lance Corporal in the Marine Corps.

I am especially proud of the Operations Team; they are the stewards of the lands and waters, ensuring that all project purposes are balanced in the quality services they provide. They deliver mission success every day and that means taking care of our visitors and working collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders. I am amazed by the talent, dedication and professionalism of the employees.

My early years of Corps' service were in the natural resources field and included duties as a park ranger, park manager and outdoor recreation planner in Rock Island, Kansas City and Omaha districts. I went on to serve in the Missouri River division working regional recreation, environmental compliance, tribal, cultural and natural resources issues. I also served as Chief of Natural Resources




in Omaha district and the Russellville Project Operations Manager for the Little Rock district. Before coming to the Savannah district, I was the Chief of Operations, Readiness and Regulatory division in the St. Louis district for eight years.

These positions enabled me to truly appreciate how important it is that we preserve healthy and sustainable lands and waters while providing safe and accessible recreation opportunities for visitors to enjoy.

As a native of Iowa, I grew up in the "the Great Outdoors" in a farming community and went on to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Parks and Recreation from the University of Iowa. Natural resources and water based recreation have always been part of my life.

I look forward to leading the great OPS team here in Savannah in all its mission areas— navigation, flood risk management, water supply, hydropower, recreation and environmental stewardship.

Whether I'm here in Savannah, at the projects on the Upper Savannah River, or on the district's navigable waters, it's a great view of people and places—from where I sit. 



Sandy Campbell, chief ranger at the Hartwell Dam and Lake Project, was a special guest on Savannah's WTOC-TV Mid-Morning Live talk show, June 14. She spoke to thousands of Savannah viewers about wearing life jackets and avoiding alcohol while on the water. The video clip is available online at www.youtube.com/savannahcorps. The interview is one example of how our rangers work every day to promote water safety education in their communities and save lives. Learn more about water safety on page 10.

Promoting America's Great Outdoors on the Upper Savannah River

With more than 153,000 acres of water and 2,700 miles of shoreline, the Savannah district's three lakes serve as some of the nation's most beautiful outdoor treasures. Located on the Upper Savannah River, Hartwell, Russell and Thurmond lakes provide a variety of recreation opportunities, including water sports, hunting, hiking, camping and fishing—all in very different settings.

The Corps team—project managers, rangers, natural resource specialists, biologists and others—that oversees the lakes shares a deep-seated responsibility to promote the natural resources that make up this part of “America's Great Outdoors.”

In fact, their daily outreach with local communities and visitors epitomizes a program launched by President Barack Obama to reconnect Americans, especially young people and families, with the lands and waters that are used for farming and ranching, hunting and fishing. The “America's Great Outdoors” initiative was created based on the premise that Americans are “losing touch with the places and proud traditions that have helped make America special,” as described by the White House, when the initiative was launched. The goal is to encourage activities that enhance health and wellness, encourage appreciation for natural and cultural resources, and present enjoyable opportunities to connect with family and friends.

As the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor recreation, the Corps operates more than 2,500 recreation areas at 463 projects. Ninety percent of all Corps projects are within 50 miles of a major metropolitan area, making

them easily accessible. In fact, one out of every ten Americans visits a Corps lake, totaling 360 million visits a year.

Hartwell Dam and Lake, located close to a major population area, has high public use (more than 10 million

Corps Lake visitors enjoy an abundance of water-based recreation activities, including swimming, jet-skiing, boating, and fishing. *Photo by J. Weaver.*



Corps campgrounds, like the one shown here at Hartwell Lake, offer a variety of amenities, such as restrooms, showers, boat ramps, sanitary disposal stations, playgrounds, electric and water hook-ups, courtesy docks, group camping, and designated swimming areas. *Photo by Brad Keshlear.*

visitors annually) and a decidedly suburban flavor, while Russell offers a more rural, pristine setting. Thurmond, with its large lake and land base, offers a combination of the two environments and unique features such as the Dorn Sport Fishing and Boating facility, one of the largest boat-launching facilities in the southeast.

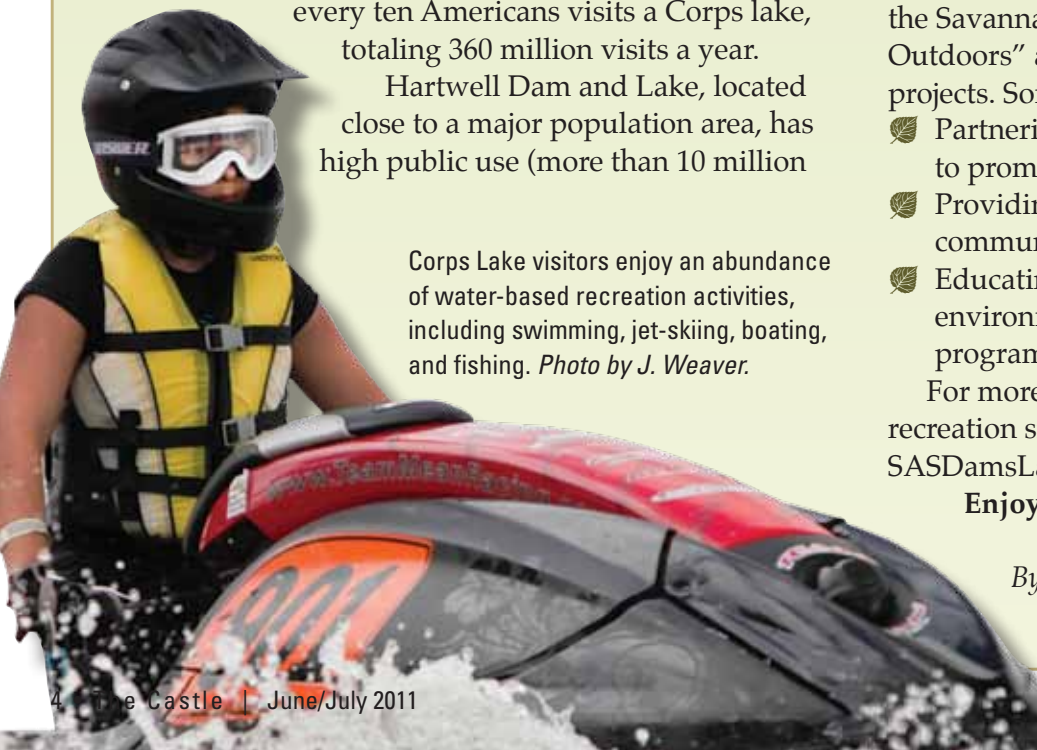
This issue of *The Castle* focuses on some of the ways the Savannah district is promoting “America's Great Outdoors” at the Hartwell, Russell, and Thurmond projects. Some of these efforts include:

- Partnering with local, state, and federal organizations to promote participation in outdoor recreation;
- Providing volunteer opportunities to engage the community; and
- Educating the public, especially youth, about the environment and water safety through outreach programs.

For more information on the Savannah district's recreation sites, visit <http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/SASDamsLakesnew.html>.

Enjoy America's Great Outdoors! 

*By Rashida Banks,
Corporate Communications Office*



Handshake partnership brings haven for biking enthusiasts

To many, a handshake symbolizes an introduction between two people. For others, it may represent a deal or an agreement. But for bike enthusiasts in the Hartwell Lake community, a handshake is the foundation for a new outdoor recreation haven.

Thanks to a Handshake Partnership agreement between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, and the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA), Hartwell Lake is now home to a professionally-designed, 7.2-mile mountain biking and multi-purpose trail.

Located at the Paynes Creek Camping area on the Tugaloo River arm of Hartwell Lake, the trail officially opened to the public during a ribbon cutting ceremony April 29. Representatives from the Corps, SORBA, and the contractor, Long Cane Trails, spoke about their involvement with the trail before cutting the ribbon together.

"The Corps' Handshake Partnership is a way for the Corps to plant the seed for community projects like this multi-purpose trail," said Ryan Hartwig, natural resources program manager at the district's headquarters in Savannah. "We drew on the expertise of groups like SORBA, who designed and mapped the trail, and along the way we developed long-lasting relationships."

The Hartwell office partnered with SORBA in 2009 to design the trail and apply for the Handshake Partnership funding. The Corps' national headquarters judged applications from all across the country based on six key factors: sustainability, partnership value, environmental stewardship value, communication and education value, recreational benefit and innovativeness.

The proposed multi-purpose trail exceeded all criteria. In January 2010, the Corps headquarters awarded Hartwell Lake \$25,000 in federal funds as a source of seed money to install the trail. SORBA matched the grant by donating an additional \$20,000 in volunteer efforts and labor toward the project.

"Under our Partnership Agreement, SORBA will help us maintain the trail and volunteer their time to ensure the project continues to benefit the Hartwell community," said Scott Kelley, Corps natural resources specialist.

Open to bikers, hikers, or walkers, the trail is nestled within the Paynes Creek 190-acre day-use area, owned and operated by the Corps.

"The trail will enhance mountain biking and recreational activities on the upper portion of Hartwell Lake and increase opportunities for bank fishing, hiking and bird watching," said Zach Harkness, natural resources program manager, Hartwell Dam and Lake.



Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Savannah District, the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association, and Long Cane Trails cut the ribbon on a new 7.2-mile multi-purpose trail at Hartwell Lake, April 29. *USACE Photo.*



Riders enjoy the newly-constructed 7.2 mile biking and multi-purpose trail at the Paynes Creek Campground area on Hartwell Lake. The trail has received positive feedback from bikers in the Hartwell community for being fast, fluid and fun. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*

"About 75 percent of the trail runs along the shoreline, so hikers get to enjoy a beautiful lakeside view while they exercise."

Volunteers make it happen

Volunteers like Jud Turpin, a Georgia National Guardsman, Hartwell-area resident, and member of the SORBA Athens chapter, helped with construction since December.

"I don't know how we would have finished the trail if it weren't for all the volunteers," said Turpin, who also serves as the trail custodian for a group of 35 volunteers. "Once the trail was cut out, we had to work on each section to finish clearing out debris, raking, and making it rideable."

Georgia SORBA groups from Gainesville, Columbus and Athens, as well as groups based in upstate South Carolina, came from hours away to volunteer their time.

"Kudos to the Corps—they've been great to work with and they've given us everything we needed," Turpin said. "They allowed us to come in and camp at the campground before it was even open, which was especially beneficial for the folks who lived far away."

Turpin said the trail is one of a kind for the Hartwell community. Before the trail was built, riders had to drive several hours away to Clemson, S.C., or Augusta, Ga., for a similar route.


"It's very fast, it flows well, and there are no dead spots," he said of the trail design. "If I had to rate it for difficulty, this would be between intermediate to advanced, but a beginner could ride the trail if they are careful going up the hills," he said, adding that his 11-year old son rode the trail three times with him.

Since it began in 2004, the Corps' Handshake Partnership Program aims to initiate new (or enhance existing) recreation and natural resources management opportunities. It encourages community engagement and promotes mutually beneficial activities between the Corps and partner organizations. The program allows the Corps to accept money, materials and volunteer services following the approval of a partnership agreement to accomplish work programs.

"The Corps' Handshake Partnership is a way for the Corps to plant the seed for community projects like this multi-purpose trail."

— Ryan Hartwig, natural resources program manager, Savannah district

"It's great to get involved with the parks and with the Corps," Turpin said. "We want to build on our partnership and host some events to raise funds that we can put back into the trail. If we can make money with the resources we already have and use those funds to keep up the maintenance—all while providing outdoor recreation—it's a win-win for everyone."

For more information on the Corps Handshake Partnership Program, visit <http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/employees/challenge/handshake.cfm> 

By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office

Corps Park Ranger Erin Parnell and several young fishermen show off a catch. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*



Community partnerships bring hunting and fishing for all

For Corps of Engineers teammates like Glenn Kowalski and Erin Parnell, the outdoors were just as much a part of their childhood as ice cream cones and skinned knees.

"I stayed outdoors until the sun went down, sometimes even longer," Kowalski, now the natural resource program manager at the Richard B. Russell Dam and Lake Project, recalled. "I grew up on an old family farm in Anderson, S.C., and I was lucky enough that I had a father that took me fishing and hunting. That's one of the reasons I have the job I have today; because I love working outside and being involved with the outdoors."

Clemson graduate and Anderson townie Erin Parnell agrees. As a newly-hired Corps of Engineers park ranger at Russell Lake, she couldn't be happier with her first job out of college.

"As a little girl I always went hunting and fishing with my father," Parnell said. "It was always an adventure to me, especially trout fishing in the Chattooga River. Those memories created my passion for the outdoors, and that's what lead me to study parks and protected areas management at Clemson University."

"My friends used to joke with me about wearing a big hat like Smokey the Bear," she said with a laugh, "but honestly, I think being a park ranger is the best job in the world."

Kowalski and Parnell's appreciation for the outdoors lies at the heart of an important Corps mission to provide and promote quality outdoor recreation for all ages. Russell Lake, along with the Savannah district's other dam and lake projects, provides recreation opportunities and events year round.

Kid's Fishing Day reels in smiles and partnerships

The Russell project hosted its 23rd annual Kid's Fishing Day on May 7, drawing 300 children and their parents from the Upper Savannah River region. The free event is hosted by the Corps but could not be a success without the help of several partnering organizations.

Along with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Corps partnered with the Southeastern Paralyzed Veterans of America, an organization dedicated to the health, education and well-being of disabled veterans and their families.

Continued on next page

"We look forward to these kinds of events where we can bring opportunities to able bodies and also to disabled veterans and disabled children," said Homer Cole, retired Marine Corps veteran and president of the Southeastern Paralyzed Veterans chapter headquartered in Augusta, Ga.

"When I was growing up, a lot of kids played in the woods, but nowadays with the fast pace of living, some people don't get out and experience nature and the outdoors as much," he added. "Our group encourages

kids to come out and get involved in these types of activities."

Other partners included the Outdoor Dream Foundation and Faith Hunters for Youth, both Anderson-based organizations that provide outdoor recreation opportunities for children in need. Community businesses also lent a helping hand by donating prizes that were awarded to lucky young fishers by a random drawing.

"We're honored to partner with our friends at Georgia DNR and with our disabled veterans, who have sacrificed so much for our country, to promote outdoor recreation for our youth," Parnell said. "We also had the opportunity to work with local youth organizations to give disabled, terminally ill or other children the opportunity to experience the joys of fishing."

The Corps stocked the enclosed fishing area at Calhoun Falls with 900 pounds of catfish, giving each child a two-catch limit. Children participated in groups of 25 in half-hour shifts to allow every child a chance to reel a catch.

When the morning fishing hours were over, Parnell and her team led a water safety presentation for the children, followed by a free hotdog lunch.



James Kennedy, a local celebrity from the movie "Radio," (left) and volunteer Chelsea Erickson look on as Glenn Kowalski, Corps natural resource program manager, removes a hook from a catfish Radio caught.



(Above): The Corps stocked the fishing area with 900 pounds of catfish for the special event. (Right): A young boy smiles after baiting his hook at Kid's Fishing Day. *Photos by Tracy Robillard.*



"Recreation is an important part of the Corps of Engineers' mission at our dam and lake projects like Lake Russell," said Keith Crowe, project manager. "By partnering with state and local organizations to host free events like Kid's Fishing Day, we're not only building relationships, but we're also encouraging the public to develop an appreciation for America's great outdoors."

Events like Kid's Fishing Day go hand-in-hand with the President's recent "America's Great Outdoors" initiative, which encourages all Americans to appreciate and protect the nation's lands, woodlands and waterways.

"One of the big White House initiatives right now is to get families outside," Kowalski said. "Kids are spending more and more time in front of the TV but this program introduces them to something they may not be familiar with. If we can get them to enjoy playing or doing activities outside, they are likely to feel more appreciation for our natural resources and want to protect those resources."

Hunting brings recreation, partnerships for children in need

But Kid's Fishing Day is just one fish in a large pond, so to speak, when it comes to the amount of public recreation opportunities offered at Russell Lake. Whether it's camping, hiking, boating, swimming, or a slew of other outdoor activities, Russell's 26,650 acres of water and 540 miles of undeveloped shoreline have it all.

Because Russell was completed in 1985 (after the Corps enacted a policy to prohibit private shoreline use on lakes built after Dec. 13, 1974) the lake maintains pure, aesthetic qualities, making it a unique place for recreation.

The Corps partners with the Outdoor Dream Foundation several times a year to give disabled or terminally-ill children the opportunity to go hunting on Russell's extensive lands.

Typically, the children hunt for deer, but the Russell team hosted its first wild turkey hunt with the foundation on April 8. Three children attended the event, two with leukemia and one with a liver disorder in need of a transplant.

Even though this particular day ended with no harvested turkeys, the children had a fun and carefree experience, Parnell said.

The Outdoor Dream Foundation, based in Anderson, S.C., is a nonprofit foundation that takes children with terminal or life-threatening illnesses on outdoor trips, to include hunting and fishing.

Outdoor Dream's founder, Harold Jones, is best known as Coach Jones from the 2003 motion picture *Radio*. The movie tells the true story of how Coach Jones befriends a mentally-challenged young man nicknamed "Radio" and helps him become an integral part of the Anderson community. *Radio* is still a community icon today and was a special guest at Kid's Fishing Day.




A child with the Outdoor Dream Foundation hunts for wild turkeys at Russell Lake. *Photo provided by the Anderson Independent Mail.*



The Corps Russell Lake office hosted its first wild turkey hunt with the Outdoor Dream Foundation on April 8. *Photo provided by the Anderson Independent Mail.*

"It's been great working with the Corps of Engineers," said Donald Hudson, a volunteer with the Outdoor Dream Foundation. "We've done deer and turkey hunts, we took a tour of the dam, and most importantly, we met different people who are going to be friends throughout our lifetime."

"Some of these kids have never been out of their own counties, some of them don't get to go on hunting or fishing trips due to their conditions, but we try to make accommodations for them," Hudson said, noting that his own son was born with a terminal illness. "It thrills my heart to see these kids go out and be able to do something they've never done before, and to see the smiles on their faces is a tear jerker, it really is." 

By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office

Recreation and Life Jackets: A win-win for everyone

In a school gymnasium surrounded by several hundred kindergarteners and first graders, Corps of Engineers Park Ranger David Quebedeaux – or “Ranger Dave” as the kids call him – taught a priceless lesson: Always wear your life jacket.

Using interactive props like goggles, hats, gloves and life jackets, Quebedeaux, a member of the J. Strom Thurmond Lake Project office, gave a water safety presentation at Maxwell Elementary School in Thomson, Ga., on May 6.

The presentation was one of many for Quebedeaux, who, like other park rangers within the Savannah

district, incorporates water safety programs into their weekly schedules.

“Bringing them water safety is a very fun and important activity that the Corps of Engineers can do,” he said. “We’re reaching kids and families who live in a lake environment. Lake Thurmond is the largest man-made lake east of the Mississippi River. The people living around it want to come out and play, but we as rangers want them to be safe.”

“I see these kids – they come out to the lake and say ‘Hey Ranger Dave! You came to my school.’ It makes you feel pretty good,” he said.

Quebedeaux chooses four volunteers to sit in chairs and pretend to ride in a boat. He gives them blacked-out goggles to simulate boating at night, gloves to simulate boating in the cold, and wacky hats to simulate a party boat. Then, the children each get a life jacket and are asked to put it on in 30 seconds while wearing all the props.

But some of Ranger Dave’s life jackets are purposely altered. Some are falling apart, some have unconventional designs, and some are too small for the children.

After an energetic countdown that echoes throughout the gymnasium, and of course, much noise and laughter, the children (none of whom can put it on in 30 seconds) learn an important lesson about life jackets.

“My program is based on education and fun. If it’s not fun, they won’t learn anything,” Quebedeaux said. “So we got some life jackets and crazy hats and other props to get them involved. But then they find out some of the life jackets don’t fit, some are torn up, some of them are unusual and the kids don’t know how they work. So we drive home the point that you need to find a life jacket that fits before getting into the boat, you need to make sure it’s on properly, and that it’s in good condition.”

“Wear It”

Everyone on a boat or near the water should wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket, whether you think

you’re a good swimmer or not. Don’t leave land without it. **EVERYONE** should **ALWAYS** wear a life jacket when in, or around water. Make sure your life jacket fits properly and is in good condition before getting on the boat. Those driving the



David Quebedeaux, park ranger at J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake, teaches children at Maxwell Elementary School to always wear their life jacket when they are in, on or near water. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*



“Ranger Dave” uses interactive props like hats, gloves, goggles and life jackets to teach children about water safety. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*

watercraft should always wear a lanyard attached to the ignition's kill switch.

Know your boat

Know your boat and know the rules of the road. Operator errors account for 70 percent of boating accidents, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. Take a boating safety class and familiarize yourself with the federal and state regulations governing boating. Find more at www.uscgboating.org

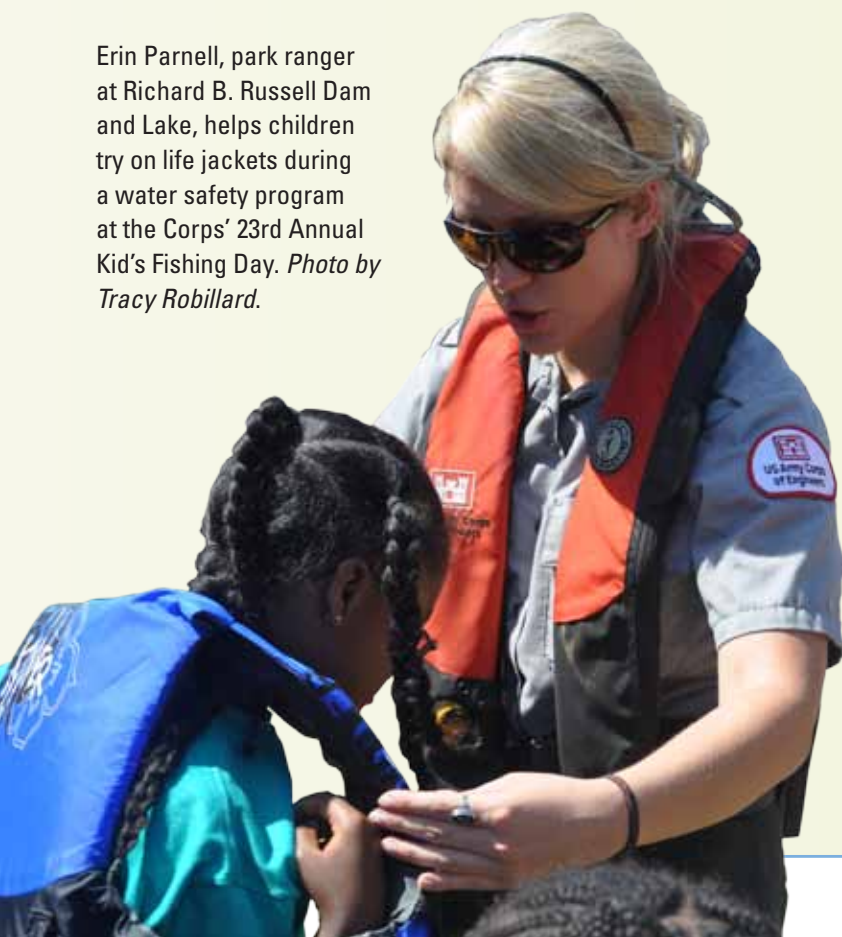
Think twice about alcohol

Alcohol is involved in up to half of all water-related deaths. Statistics show that one half of all adolescent male drownings are tied to alcohol use. Make sure the captain or person handling the boat is experienced and competent. Because there are no road signs or lane markers on the water, and the weather can be unpredictable, it's important to be able to think quickly and react well under pressure. If you're drinking alcohol, this is impossible.

Beware of fatigue

The Coast Guard warns people about a condition called boater's fatigue, which means that the wind, noise, heat, and vibration of the boat all combine to wear you down when you're on the water. Be aware of this risk factor and take breaks when you feel fatigued. Be sure to drink plenty of water to help stay hydrated.

Erin Parnell, park ranger at Richard B. Russell Dam and Lake, helps children try on life jackets during a water safety program at the Corps' 23rd Annual Kid's Fishing Day. *Photo by Tracy Robillard.*



Tanya Grant, park ranger at Hartwell Dam and Lake, encourages visitors to always wear life jackets while swimming or boating. If they don't have their own life jacket, visitors can borrow one through the Corps' Life Jacket Loaner Program. *Photo by J. Weaver.*

Know your surroundings

Be knowledgeable of the water environment you are in and its potential hazards, such as deep and shallow areas, currents, depth changes, obstructions and where the entry and exit points are located. The more informed you and your family are, the less likely you are to be injured or killed.

Feet first

Always use a feet-first water entry. Head and neck injuries and resulting fatalities occur far more often from "diving" in head first.

Never swim alone

Always swim with a partner. Even experienced swimmers can become tired or get muscle cramps, which might make it difficult to get out of the water. Swimming in an open body of water (such as a river, lake, or ocean) is different from swimming in a pool because it requires more energy to handle the currents and other conditions. When people swim together, they can help each other or go for help in case of an emergency.

Learn more

Children and their parents can learn more about water safety with Bobber the Water Safety Dog, an interactive mascot for the Corps of Engineers National Water Safety Program. Check it out online at: <http://watersafety.usace.army.mil>



By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office

Park rangers promote environmental education

How do you measure a fish's fork length? How are lakes formed? What is zooplankton? How do fish swim?

More than a hundred middle school students from the Central Savannah River area found the answers to these questions (and more) at the Corps of Engineers segment at the 10th Annual Eco-Meet event, May 6.

Corps team members from the J. Strom Thurmond Dam and Lake Project staffed the exhibit, which gave students an opportunity to test their knowledge on lake ecology and fish biology. The Corps team included Ken Boyd, conservation biologist; Susan Boyd, chief ranger; and Eric Haskell, environmental compliance coordinator.

"Essentially, the meet is a middle school science competition where students do hands-on activities and take tests on environmental topics," Susan Boyd said. "The winning teams receive medals and other prizes, plus there is entertainment provided at the end. It's a great way to promote environmental awareness and education in the community."

Founded in 1998, the ESEC serves as an educational gateway for organizations in the Central Savannah River area to coordinate events and collaborate on projects. The cooperative began with only a handful of participating organizations but has expanded throughout the years to include state and federal governments, non-profit groups and academic institutions.

"It's a unique group of organizations that are all involved with the environment," Susan Boyd said, listing a few examples such as the U.S. Forest Service, Fort Fordon, Ga., and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and of course, the Corps of Engineers.



Middle school students measure a Shortnosed Gar, a species of fish that inhabits Thurmond Lake, at the Corps of Engineers booth at the annual Eco-Meet event. The students measured total length (end to end), fork length (end of snout to fork in tail) and standard length (body of fish minus caudal fin).

Each year, the event is hosted by a different site among members of the CSRA. This year's host was the Silver Bluff Audubon Center and Sanctuary in Jackson, S.C., a refuge to more than 200 species of birds comprising more than 3,000 acres of forests, fields, lakes and streams.

The Corps' Thurmond team has participated in the Eco-Meet since its inception, focusing on topics ranging from wetlands science to hydropower.


Boyd develops the information packets and rotates through them every few years to ensure returning students don't get tested on the same material.

"We try to tie it back to the standards in their science curriculum and make it interesting for them," Boyd said, noting that a lot of science clubs participate in the event.

Students team up and register for the competition as early as January. They receive study packets on various environmental science topics, which they study in their extra time until the Eco-Meet in May. The teams rotate through each topic station and take tests to win prizes.

"The kids enjoy it. We always get positive feedback," Susan Boyd said.

"We have a very large environmental stewardship program at Thurmond Lake," Susan Boyd said. "We're responsible for a large land and water base, so ensuring the health of the environment we manage is critical."

"It's also important to make the general public and our future generations aware of the resources we manage and how we protect our natural resources," she added. "Events like the Eco-Meet help us tell our story and allow us to give the public a basic scientific understanding." 

By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office



Ken Boyd, Corps conservation biologist, helps a student inspect a Daphnia, or water flea, under a microscope. The Daphnia is a type of zooplankton – the smallest consumers in a lake ecosystem that eat algae and bacteria. *Photos by Tracy Robillard.*

Savannah District News



District employees take a trivia quiz about the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project.
Photo by George Jumara

Savannah District Earth Day celebration both educational and entertaining

Savannah district celebrated Earth Day April 22 with interactive exhibits highlighting environmental aspects of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project as well as environmental stewardship of the Regulatory Division. Team members learned about the engineering, economics and environmental mitigation components of SHEP and also saw a demonstration of a wetlands model and the new online avatar as part of the Regulatory exhibit. During the event, employees participated in trivia contests, winning prizes for their newly-gained environmental knowledge. Members of the Regulatory Division also participated in the City of Savannah's Earth Day festival April 23 at Forsyth Park, where they provided the community with information on the district's commitment to the environment.



Savannah district Regulatory Specialist Donald Nesbitt demonstrates the wetland model for a group of children during the Earth Day celebration April 23 at Forsyth Path. Mark Padgett (far left) and Stan Knight (middle), both regulatory specialists, were also on hand to answer questions about the district's Regulatory Program. *USACE Photo.*

FEST-Advanced team prepares for deployment



Members of the 542nd Engineer Detachment pack their equipment May 24 at Hunter Army Airfield, Ga., in preparation for a deployment to Iraq.

Photos by Tracy Robillard

The 542nd Engineer Detachment, known as a Forward Engineer Support Team – Advanced, or FEST-A, is a mobile, rapid-response team that deploys with Army ground units to solve technical engineering problems. The detachment is one of eight active-duty FEST-A teams in the country. One of this team's most critical missions is to assist with the transition as the U.S. military leaves Iraq and turns over continuing operations to the State Department. Stationed at Hunter Army Airfield, Ga., the team consists of an officer-in-charge and a non-commissioned officer, along with six civilians who specialize in mechanical, civil, electrical and environmental engineering, cartography (map making) and contracting.

While deployed to southern Iraq, the team will provide engineering, contracting, and quality assurance support to construct the largest consulate in the world, which will house 1,600 employees. The team will focus on expansion of the base camp, as well as advise and assist the private contractor working on the site.

Read more about the 542nd Engineer Detachment in the next issue of the Desert Times, also available online at <http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/DesertTimes/index.html>

The 542nd Engineer Detachment team members are:(from left to right)

Sgt. 1st Class Jason Stover, non-commissioned officer-in-charge
Alonzo Lyford, civilian team leader and mechanical engineer
Terry McFarland, contracting specialist
Ivelisse Alvarez, electrical engineer
Joel Fuchs, cartographer
Bruce Myhre, environmental engineer
Jeremy Miller, civil engineer
Maj. Jared Runge, commander



Savannah District Diversity Day a hit



Jeannine Dukes, EEO student aide, greets district team members at the sign-in booth during the Diversity Day event in Telfair Square. Photo by George Jumara.

Perfect weather and the Hostess City's historic Telfair Square set the scene for Savannah district's Diversity Day, April 13. The celebration, sponsored by the Special Emphasis Program Committee under the auspices of the Equal Employment Opportunity Office, started with a Fun Run/Walk, followed by guest presentations on diversity and multi-cultural performances. Almost 200 people entered the "Passport to Diversity" scavenger hunt and received a list of items that they were to find and check off. They searched for the items at the food booths, "Areas of Expression" displays, and other areas in the square. Real Estate Division's Patty Casey won the appropriate grand prize, a desk-sized globe.

Tritten assumes deputy commander position



Maj. Brian J. Tritten became the Acting Deputy Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District on April 15. He assumed these duties from Lt. Col. David T. London, who is currently deployed to Afghanistan. Tritten arrived from the U.S. Army Student Detachment, Fort Jackson, S.C., with duty in Norfolk, Va.,

where he attended graduate school at Old Dominion University from August 2009 to December 2010. Tritten also holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries and Wildlife from Michigan State University. Commissioned as an Engineer Officer in June of 2000, Tritten has served in various engineer command and staff positions in the United States and overseas. He has received numerous awards and decorations throughout his career including the Bronze Star Medal (with oak leaf cluster), the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal (with oak leaf cluster), and Army Achievement Medal.

Emergency Management welcomes new chief



Judith K. Patterson became the Chief of Emergency Management Division in May 2011. As chief, Patterson serves as principal advisor to the commander on all matters relating to natural disasters, national emergencies, other contingency operations requiring support to civil authority, and terrorism activities. She

also leads a district-wide team in developing plans for natural disasters/emergency conditions and participates in regional and district-wide exercises to ensure the readiness of the division and districts. Before assuming her current position, she was the Natural Disaster Manager with the district.

During her 31 years of service with the Savannah district, Patterson has served in numerous positions to include security officer, national emergency manager and national emergency specialist. She has been recognized with two Commander's Awards for Civilian Service.



8th Annual Best Dam Ride challenges bikers, raises funds for burn victims

For the last eight years, biking enthusiasts throughout the Upper Savannah River region have flocked to the J. Strom Thurmond Dam to pedal their way toward a worthy cause. This year was no different.

More than 450 riders participated in the 8th Annual Best Dam Ride on April 17. The event raised more than \$12,000 for the Southeastern Firefighters' Burn Foundation, which provides assistance to patients and their families who are undergoing treatment at the Joseph M. Still Burn Center in Augusta, Ga.

Starting at the dam, the route covers two states, three counties and 12 communities surrounding Thurmond Lake. Riders could select routes anywhere from 5 miles to 100 miles to customize the ride to their fitness level. The Southern Off-Road Biking Association sponsored an off-road course for those who preferred mountain biking.

Event organizer Phil Cohen has worked with the Corps of Engineers' Thurmond team every year to plan the Best Dam Ride. "Working with the Corps has been great," he said. "All the folks up at Thurmond Lake have been very helpful in making this event a success." 🇨🇦

By Tracy Robillard, Corporate Communications Office

Photos by Phil Cohen.

